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THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

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†"The First Million" opened Wednesday, April 28th, at the Ritz Theatre.
†"Sons and Soldiers" opened Tuesday, May 4th, at the Morosco Theatre.
†"Three's a Family" opened Wednesday, May 5th, at the Longacre Theatre.

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"Sons and Soldiers"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 5, 1943

'Sons and Soldiers' A Well Acted Drama, Handsomely Staged

"Sons and Soldiers," drama by Irwin Shaw. Produced by Max Reinhardt, Norman Biel Geddes and Richard Myers, at the Morosco Theatre, New York, May 4, 1943.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

REBECCA Tadlock thought she was going to have a baby. That's the starting point of Irwin Shaw's "Sons and Soldiers," which opened at the Morosco Theatre last night. And Rebecca's doctor thought if she did have a baby she would die on the operating table. He advised her distraught husband to take steps.

In the deep depression that followed the revelation to Rebecca, who very much wanted that baby, something in her mind snapped, and her subconscious took possession.

She fainted, and while her husband and the doctor were flying about for restoratives, Rebecca suffered visions of what was going to happen if she did have that baby. For the most part her visions are Mr. Shaw's play.

Now, whether Rebecca's projection of her life from the year 1916 into the future as far as 1940 can be justified by the experts who know their metaphysics or not I couldn't say.

But I can say that in applying this dream sequence to his play Mr. Shaw has managed to tell a familiar story in a new way, and to hold his hearers steadily interested while he is telling it.

Max, Norman and Richard

"Sons and Soldiers" thus becomes a domestic drama with vision added; a war play with a definite difference. Max Reinhardt, a partner in the production, has directed the performances of a cast of excellent actors with nice touches of familiar stage tricks of which he is a master, and Norman Bel Geddes, also a partner, (with Richard Myers and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) has provided a setting sufficiently handsome to justify a visit to the theatre on its own account.

In Rebecca's vision she first meets the son she hopes to have when he is 25. She is very proud and happy to find him so stalwart and so fine. But he, knowing more about how he got into the vision than she does, is not so sure. Maybe she wouldn't like him if she knew—

Whereupon we go forward to discover that the boy, Andrew is destined to go through most of the experiences young men go through; that Rebecca is frequently made extremely miserable because she cannot direct his life, and that in the end she has to give him up to the war as thousands of other unhappy mothers have given their sons.

Fine Cast

The cast is one able to take advantage of the opportunities offered. Geraldine Fitzgerald, an Irish actress who came from Dublin to play in "Heartbreak House" with Orson Welles and then went to Hollywood and into pictures, has the best of the opportunities.

Miss Fitzgerald is both competent and likeable. She can play sentiment, as she does in a scene in which she is nursing her second dream child, and bypass all the maudlin temptations. She can become bitter without too much dependence on makeup and direction. It is good for her, and good for the theatre, that her picture backers wanted her to have this opportunity.

Gregory Peck plays the son, and he happens to be one of the genuinely promising young leading men of his time, as those of you who saw him in "Morning Star" and briefly in "The Willow and I" will recall.

Stella Adler has a fine short part as a scarlet lady of some character which she plays intelligently, and Millard Mitchell sheds his gifts as an actor of farce to play a serious young doctor magnificently.

Herbert Rudley is a noble husband, Leonard Sues is an engaging college trumpeter, Karl Malden and Kenneth Tobey are helpful, and there are three gifted children in Joan McSweeney, Ted Donaldson and Jack Willett.

I have an idea you are going to like "Sons and Soldiers" for the very perfections in acting and staging with which it is surrounded.

'SONS AND SOLDIERS'

Play by Irwin Shaw; staging by Max Reinhardt; production designed by Norman Bel Geddes; presented at the Morosco Theater Tuesday, May 4, 1943, by Reinhardt, Geddes and Richard Myers. The cast:

John Tadlock	Herbert Rudley
Victor Carnrick	Millard Mitchell
Rebecca Tadlock	Geraldine Fitzgerald
Andrew Tadlock	Gregory Peck
Andrew Tadlock, as a child	Jack Willett
Dora Applegate, as a child	Joan McSweeney
Ernest Tadlock, as a child	Ted Donaldson
Lincoln Graves	Leonard Sues
Ernest Tadlock	Kenneth Tobey
Matthew Graves	Karl Malden
Marie	Sara Lee Harris
Anthony	Roderick Maybee
Miss Gillespie	Martha Greenhouse
Mr. Leverhook	William Bench
Mark Lowry	Edward Forbes
Dora Applegate	Audrey Long
Catherine Carnrick	Stella Adler
The Mailman	Edward Nannary
The Salesman	Jesse White
Catherine's Escort	Albert Bergh
Carol	Phyllis Hill
Alice	Harriet Jackson
Minister	Royal Dana Tracy

NEW YORK SUN
May 5, 1943

Irwin Shaw's 'Sons and Soldiers,' With Flashahead Technic, Opens at Morosco

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"SONS and Soldiers," one of the season's most elaborately sponsored ventures — money by Metro, staging by Reinhardt, scenery by Geddes and play by Irwin Shaw — came last evening into the Morosco. The result is more production than play, more striving for effect than ever getting it.

There is some pungent writing by Mr. Shaw, who has given the theater such creditable pieces as "Bury the Dead" and "The Gentle People." There are some sharply observant scenes, good incidental comedy and moments of soaring dialogue. But however effective are occasional portions of "Sons and Soldiers," the whole of it comes forth as a scanty play—loose, faltering, talky and immature. A lot of it, like the life that the talented and handsome Andrew is to live, is hard to take.

In Broadway's bygone years Elmer Rice, then an obscure law clerk, thrilled New York with a novelty melodrama called "On Trial." It was particularly effective because of the introduction of the flashback. Now Irwin Shaw turns to the flash-ahead technic for the telling of his three-act play, the locale of which is a small American city, year of 1916.

His heroine, Rebecca Tadlock, is told that she will probably die if she gives birth to her expected baby. In the flash-ahead scenes, which come along intermittently, the life of the boy that is to be, the son Andrew, is unfolded — his tortures, despairs, exaltations, triumphs, loves, passions, romance — and, finally, when he is in his twenties, his going off to war. To total war, which takes the life of one out of every five. But it is Rebecca's decision that the life she has seen for her son Andrew is worth his living it, and worth risking her own to have him live it.

The production for "Sons and Soldiers" is a handsome one, and the scenery is what you would expect from Mr. Geddes. The acting, in the majority of the roles, is well done. Geraldine Fitzgerald is good-looking, appealing and resourceful for most of the way. She is back to the theater after several Hollywood years. She achieves something of a feat in making a minor drunk scene both effective and funny. Gregory Peck, making his third Broadway appearance of the season and his second on the stage of the Morosco, is proving himself quite a fellow to have around. Of romantic voice and presence, he will find better parts than the trying one of Andrew Tadlock.

Then there's the droll Millard Mitchell, who isn't type-cast for once. You will usually find Mitch playing reporters, detectives, thugs. But this time, he's a doctor, and on the serious side. He's excellent, and so are Leonard Sues and Stella Adler, an actress who can pack excitement into a scene whether it's there or not. The children, Jack Willett, Ted Donaldson and Joan McSweeney, are superb.

As a play, "Sons and Soldiers" doesn't come off. I wonder how they thought it would. As a picture it just might. Perhaps Metro has considered that, too.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 5, 1943

American Cavalcade

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY, JR.

THE new Irwin Shaw play which opened last night at the Morosco is one of the season's most earnest dramas. Its action unfolds the story of an American family whose son grows up in the increasing tension of the post-war era, and it is presented in a score or more of short scenes in varying moods. It becomes a theatrical coat of many colors, some vivid and some pallid. On the whole, however, each scene builds upon its predecessor, setting forth the changing patterns of the lives of its characters and achieving a fine dramatic effect.

* * *

"Sons and Soldiers" does not have everything on its side, but its errors are largely paltry and do not by any means dull the edge of its message. It has a slow beginning, and it does not explain itself fully until the second act. It is written in the "flash-forward" technique—a young mother is looking into the future and seeing what is to happen to her unborn son—and this is apt to be confusing during the opening scenes. The play is a statement to every mother that no matter how difficult the future may be for her son, he would still thank her for the chance to live. From the second act on it tells this story with feeling, eloquence and an extraordinary insight into both the lighter and darker side of the human character.

* * *

Max Reinhardt has staged "Sons and Soldiers" with an eye to the quality of movement inherent in its subdivided construction. There are sudden, though short, flaws in the midst of some of the play's effective moments, and one feels that these might have been ironed out had there been more time spent in production. Geraldine Fitzgerald, who appears as the mother of the family, tends, like most of the performers, to overplay the lines here and there. In general, though, she gets the most out of the varying emotions written into her part. The over-all quality of the acting is excellent, and there are some exceptionally fine bit performances. Gregory Peck as the oldest son, Millard Mitchell as the family doctor, Stella Adler as his wife, Karl Malden as a soldier of fortune, and Kenneth Tobey as the youngest son, are very much at home in their parts. There are very good short performances by Ted Donaldson, a child actor; Leonard Sues, Edward Mannery and Jesse White.

* * *

Norman Bel Geddes has designed an ingenius set for the play's many scenes. The family's large living-room provides the background for all of them, and there are flats representing other locations dropped into a small area within this central set when the mother's visions take her son to his college, his office and other locations. Messrs. Geddes, Reinhardt and Richard Myers had a fine script to start with, and they have given it a production whose faults will be erased by time.

* * *

Mr. Shaw's art has been employed to tell an urgent story: that no war, no matter how vicious and destructive, should halt the evolution of human life. He has mixed his moments of straight comedy and high tragedy to form an accurate panorama of American life and a thoughtful evaluation of American ideals.

"Sons and Soldiers"

THE NEW YORK TIMES
May 5, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Sons and Soldiers"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT is obvious that "Sons and Soldiers" should be a major event of the theatre season, for it was written by Irwin Shaw and was staged by Max Reinhardt before settings by Norman Bel Geddes. But last evening when the latter two in association with Richard Myers brought it to the Morosco it seemed not a little disappointing. An occasional scene is good, as on the whole is the acting, but as the substance for a full evening in the theatre "Sons and Soldiers" often appeared talky and scattered, with a good many stock situations and with pretentiousness not always absent.

* * *

Probably the blame belongs to Mr. Shaw as much as any one else. He has asked whether a woman, about to have a son in 1916, would still wish to have one could she see ahead to the present. As a question for the theatre, that is all right; but Mr. Shaw has been less than satisfactory in working out his answer. He uses the dream method, which is confusing, and he picks incidents for the growth of the son from the oldest of stock situations—the college room, the affair with the married woman, the cynical family physician, the girl next door, whom he finally marries. An audience is left with the feeling it has seen it all before, which defeats Mr. Shaw's obvious sincerity.

Geraldine Fitzgerald plays the mother, a task that is far from simple, since at various times she is of all ages and all moods; at one moment she is a young married woman and the next the mother of a 20-year-old son. This is a chameleon test for any actress, and one which Miss Fitzgerald wins, for the most part, without difficulty. The boy, in the mature years starting with college, is played by Gregory Peck, who also does well, and the cast includes a number of players who contribute excellent minor characters—Leonard Sues, the trumpeter and the Harry James of the legitimate stage, as a friend of the boy; Ted Donaldson, Millard Mitchell as the doctor; Karl Malden, Stella Adler, Herbert Rudley and others.

* * *

Mr. Reinhardt has directed "Sons and Soldiers" for movement, and also has tried to bring out the minor characters, succeeding in the latter point to the extent that the play offers a number of fine vignettes, but he has not succeeded in disguising the fact the play is not there to begin with. Every one obviously has worked with great earnestness on a subject deserving the best—the woman's point of view on her sons and soldiers—but their evening remains rather empty, nevertheless.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
May 5, 1943

A Simple Story In Fancy Words

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Sons and Soldiers,* Irwin Shaw has chosen a very fancy framework and some pretty fancy talk to tell a story that, dealing with universal experience, should be at all costs simply told. For that reason it almost completely misses the poignancy and broad humanity it might have had. By rising into pretentiousness, it falls all the more precipitously into platitude; and by choosing an artificial method to make its final point, it makes it unconvincingly.

Mr. Shaw has pictured for us a pregnant young wife of 20-odd years ago, who is told by her doctor that she will almost certainly die if she attempts to have her child. In a succession of dreams, she visualizes two sons and foresees their lives from infancy to manhood. *Sons and Soldiers* is largely the story of her older son Andrew, whom we see practicing the piano as another Penrod; bouncing through college as another Willie Baxter; falling head over heels in love with a loose married woman who soon throws him over; indulging in a little radicalism; marrying the girl down the street who has always loved him; and at last going off to a war that has already claimed the life of his younger brother.

But at the end of her dreams, neither the danger to her own life nor the tragic vision she has had of her sons will dissuade the young wife from having her child: to affirm the importance of living, she faces the danger of dying.

* * *

I can find no virtue in Mr. Shaw's elaborate framework. Simply as a device, it is not necessary to what he has to say; as anything more, it helps to discredit what he is saying. The young wife's dreams are not dreamlike, they are simply straightforward episodes involving actual future events. Furthermore, the mother's final affirmation would have infinitely more meaning as the result of actual mature experience than it has as a *very young bride's* visionary guesswork.

As for the episodes in the story proper, they are of varying effectiveness as theater. But not one of them offers anything particularly fresh or revealing, and almost all of them lose some of their humanity because Mr. Shaw cannot stick for long to plain unvarnished writing. Instead of natural conversation we are all too often given set speeches and bookish talk. Perhaps Mr. Shaw suspected that the typical experiences of a typical young man will not stretch quite far enough in the theater. If so, he was probably right. But overstretching them with unnatural dialogue does not enhance their value; it merely lessens it.

As the mother, Geraldine Fitzgerald struggles through an emotional part with uneven effect. As Andrew, Gregory Peck plays straightforwardly to fair advantage. Leonard Sues helps matter out with his usual skill on the trumpet; and Millard Mitchell carries off a rather foolish scene with remarkable adroitness. Stella Adler does what she can as the siren. Ted Donaldson is extremely good in a kid part. Mr. Bel Geddes' major set is charming.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 5, 1943

Geraldine Fitzgerald Takes Top Honors as Sons and Soldiers Opens

By BURTON RASCOE

LAST night I felt as Keats says he felt upon first looking into Chapman's Homer, for, as a watcher of the theatrical skies, I saw a new planet swim into my ken. Not a mere star—for she was not even billed as a star and she has been starred (in movies) before—but a wondrous planet, more lustrous and more quickening than a stellar flash on the marquees.

Her name is Geraldine Fitzgerald. Watching her, in Sons and Soldiers at the Morosco last night I stared, silent, in wild surmise. But when the show was over few hands in the theater were silent, the applause in appreciation of her was ecstatic. Appearing as only one of six featured players, she will be starred before the run of Sons and Soldiers (which I think will be a long and prosperous one) is out, or I miss my guess.

True, Miss Fitzgerald had a veritable pumpkin coach of a vehicle for her gifts, gorgeously caparisoned by Max Reinhardt and Norman Bel Geddes, in this down-to-the-minute modernization by Irwin Shaw of the old morality play Everyman. She was on the stage much of the time and, when she was on it, her role dominated every scene; she was given that chance every actress prays for—role allowing her to appear at different ages and in a great variety of moods; and she was surrounded by as fine a cast as you could wish to see, all subtly directed by Mr. Reinhardt to point up her role whenever she was present. But these advantages could have become handicaps to a less resourceful artist. She was given two long speeches, which by their very nature could have thrown many an able actress. One was a cooing speech to a baby nursing at her breast, in which she outlined in detail the life of honor, achievement, love, brilliance and splendor she wished for him. The other was an apostrophe to life itself as an adventure without worth or meaning unless one has experienced its tragedy as well as its joy, its miseries as well as its ecstacies. Either speech, without Miss Fitzgerald's beautiful shadings and range of voice or without her proper sense of stress and timing could easily have become either tedious or banal or worse. She made exalted poetry of them by the Irish music of her voice.

The play dramatizes the experience of every expectant mother's heart; it dramatizes her hopes and fears for her child, her anticipation of the hazards, the pitfalls, the drudgeries, the disappointments, the miseries (distilled from her own observation and experience), as well as the joys, both simple and exalted, that life holds for those as yet unborn; it dramatizes what every mother feels within her heart who sees her son or sons go off to war. And it hits at the very essential core of maternity—that feeling that every mother has that, even if her son should die in war, he has also experienced the adventure and mystery of life and thus has made child-bearing a valid function and justified her existence.

* * *

A Youngster Stars

The drama opens with the family doctor's pronouncement that Mrs. Tadlock's constitution and physical makeup will not permit her to have a child; the chances are 90 out of 100 that she will die in childbirth if she insists on going through it. The hopes of the young couple are centered upon having children—at least a son who will bear the father's name and profit by all the father has learned and missed. Mrs. Tadlock (Miss Fitzgerald) in a dream, consisting of visions and nightmares, sees her first and second sons' lives unfold, from childhood to the time they go away to war; for the scene is laid in 1916, when mothers, then, as now, were troubled by the fears war gives them about the future of their sons . . . She awakes from her dream demanding to go through with the accouchement.

We see the youngsters already turning out to be very ordinary, human boys and not the angels the mother had wished them to be. (In this scene of the children in the first act, by the way, young Ted Donaldson nearly stopped the show by his appearance, his assurance, his endearing audacity. It was a good thing for the play that he never appeared again, such an appealing delight was he.) The mother has dominated the elder boy, seeking to smooth the path for him and to guide him in the usual maternal fashion; and he revolts against it as all healthy boys must. He experiences the usual bewilderments, anxieties, passions, ambitions, disgusts and happiness of adolescence; he falls violently in love with a prostitute whom he cannot believe is otherwise than he thinks her to be and who, in her turn, has been rewarded with a glimpse of the love she is seeking; and in time he is married in uniform with two days' leave before going overseas.

All this is not new, of course, but the writing, the directing and the acting have made it new, fresh, exciting and moving. Everything is very real and natural in this play; nothing is sentimentalized or falsified. It is human and very true to life as we know it. Special honors go to Millard Mitchell as the doctor dis-illusioned by life; to Gregory Peck as the elder son (Mr. Peck grows in stature as an actor with each new role and he is one of the best of contemporary juveniles); to Stella Adler as the prostitute; to Leonard Sues as the adventurer and soldier of fortune, and to Audrey Long as the sweet and pretty girl the elder Tadlock boy eventually marries. But the whole cast is so good that even bits by Edward Nannery, Karl Malden, Sara Lee Harris and little Joan McSweeney stand out as memorable. This play is an unusual treat. It renews one's faith in life.

"Sons and Soldiers"

N. Y. JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 5, 1943

Geraldine Fitzgerald Heads Cast in Irwin Shaw's 'New' Dream Play

By JOHN ANDERSON

LIKE the clown who wears spats but no shoes the new play at the Morosco is suffering from delusions of grandeur. It is a maudlin word-stuffed drama by Irwin Shaw called "Sons and Soldiers" and it sounds like all the wild empty plays scribbled in outline on speakeasy menus during the Volstead Rennaissance. They faced only the morning after. This one confronts the morning after the first night clad in nothing more modern than horsefeathers.

What makes its orie-eyed appearance out of another world even more fantastic is that Max Reinhardt and Norman Bel Geddes have joined their several talents in the production and Mr. Geddes has worked up a set that just slathers with rich beautiful space. The grand piano is a mere tuck-away. A double-decker circular staircase spirals up one side with ascending arrogance. An actor crossing to a sofa on the opposite side of the stage seems to be setting out practically on a journey. Magical light effects are contrived by the Wizard of the World of Tomorrow, and his work winds up by housing a play of the day before yesterday which really needs nothing more elaborate, I should guess, than a fairly strong metal container with a foot-controlled lid.

Dreams Three Acts

It houses, specifically, a drama about why Rebecca Tadlock decided in 1916 to have a child. Though the playbill says she and Mr. T lived in a small American city, I imagine it must have been fairly large to contain their living room, which may have been just as well, for as things turned out Mrs. Tadlock was going to do a lot of dreaming there in that room. She was, in fact, with no one except the audience to stop her, going to dream three mortal acts of "Sons and Soldiers" not including prologue and epilogue.

She has been told by her husband and the family doctor that she cannot have a baby, without risking her life, so she lies down on the sofa and just lets her subconscious mind go buckety-buckety in a dream sequence lasting far into the night. She dreams not of one son but two, so phooey on the doctor.

There is the elder, the lean tall Andrew, straight and tempestuous, with his fine spirit, his love affairs and all, and his safe marriage to the little girl next door, and finally there is the grave, level-eyed Andrew going off to the war in a flier's uniform saying that he will give his life gladly for what he believes in. He has, he points out with crushing logic, listened to Beethoven, swum in the Atlantic, loved and been loved—so why not.

Wishful Reverie

For all I know from my own inexperience in the matter, this may be fine pre-natal conditioning but it is certainly marshmallow playmaking. Mrs. T obviously raises her boy to be a soldier, and when she goes out grandly to childbirth in 1916 we may all honor her noble precautions for 1943. We are her heirs, executors, and assigns, with patriotic thanks.

It was my unhappy misfortune to suspect, however, that there weren't many words of simple sense or real feeling from one end of the play to the other and that Mr. Shaw had simply engaged himself in a little wishful reverie with ex post facto attachments to make it safe and that the most that any intelligent mother would dream in the circumstances would be merely that her son would be a man and do his job. The rest seems sentimental bushwah, but reeking the sort of flapdoodle that has no more connection with the tough spirit of real people at war than a bag of jelly-beans has with a broadside from the U.S.S. Iowa.

Slick Dreamer

Putting some tin jewelry in Cartier's window would naturally attract attention by the very distortion of values, and the plush production at the Morosco emphasizes the poverty of the play. Since one of the characters is a trumpeter they have no less than Leonard Sues for the part because Mrs. Tadlock is a slick dreamer all right, and straight up the Herr Professor Reinhardt's alley. She dreams white socks on a comic old gentleman, lilies of the valley blooming in September, an intrusive vacuum cleaner salesman and all the rest of it. I wished to Heaven she, and not I, had had insomnia.

The whole business is acted for far more than it is worth. Geraldine Fitzgerald plays the mother and it's just her bad luck. Stella Adler is excellent as adolescent Andrew's lady friend and Millard Mitchell does wonders with a short passage as an embittered doctor. Gregory Peck gives an admirable account of himself as young Andrew and still deserves the sort of play he is entitled to and never gets. Mr. Sues still plays a sweet trumpet with ingratiating pleasure for himself and everybody else.

There were moments in the play when I wouldn't have cared if he had been the Angel Gabriel.

NEW YORK POST
May 5, 1943

Irwin Shaw's "Sons and Soldiers" Produced at the Morosco

By WILELLA WALDORF

IRWIN Shaw, who one wrote a bitterly effective war drama called "Bury the Dead," is the author of "Sons and Soldiers," produced on a rather elaborate scale last night at the Morosco Theatre by the new firm composed of Max Reinhardt, Norman Bel Geddes and Richard Myers.

"Sons and Soldiers" is three or four times as long as "Bury the Dead" was. Some of it is merely routine play writing. An occasional episode seems unnecessarily awkward. But there are scenes here and there that make you sit up in your seat and realize that Mr. Shaw has something to say in the theatre, and knows how to say it.

Despite its title, "Sons and Soldiers" is not what is generally called a war play. It is a leading-up-to-the-war play. It begins and ends in 1916, if that gives you any idea, and although it traces the life of Rebecca Tadlock's son Andrew from babyhood, through college, into the world of commerce, in and out of one or two mix-ups with women, up to the present conflict, it is still only 1916.

Mr. Shaw uses a variation of the old dream technique. Rebecca is going to have a baby, but her doctor fears that if she goes through with it, she will die. She is urged by both her husband and her physician not to risk it, and while they are preparing to take her to the hospital, she swoons on the living room couch and projects herself into the future.

It seems she has not only one baby, but two—Andrew and Ernest. There is a very

Pretty Good Dreaming For 1916

funny scene involving a couple of bright child actors (no play on Broadway is complete without its precocious infants this season).

Rebecca's dreaming is really something to conjure with. She not only traces her not-yet-born offspring into early manhood, but also glimpses the future lives of some of the neighbors, and foresees what Hitler's been up to, which is pretty good for 1916.

This arrangement, however, though it seems just a bit foolish at times, permits the author to have Rebecca come out of her trance occasionally to make the great decision—to have, or not to have, that child.

When she wakes up after watching Andrew as a young man making himself miserable over a slut, she shrieks "No No!" But in the end, when Andrew is discovered in Air Force uniform, marrying the nice girl next door, she decides it's worth going through with after all, for Andrew tells her that even if he's killed tomorrow, life so far has been worth living.

This is difficult stuff to handle, both from the point of view of playwright and director, and it is a tribute to both Irwin Shaw and Max Reinhardt when we say that "Sons and Soldiers" succeeds more often than not in being not only interesting, but sometimes uncommonly moving as well. It has the human touch.

The Reinhardt, Geddes Production

Many characters—some of them amusing people tossed in just for a laugh—stream through the Tadlock living room, which retains its contours while Mr. Geddes's revolving stage-within-a-stage whirls Rebecca's unborn son into an uncertain future.

Mr. Reinhardt and Mr. Geddes know how to put on a bang-up show for the customers. Now and then, to be sure, we wondered when characters would begin hallooing from the balcony or rising up out of the boxes in the good old expansive Reinhardt manner (also, of course, the Olsen and Johnson manner), but Mr. Reinhardt restrains himself at the Morosco. The goings-on are strictly confined to the stage, even if the time element does get out of hand.

But it is the actors who help most to make "Sons and Soldiers" an evening to remember in the theatre. There is, for instance, Geraldine Fitzgerald, a lovely Irish actress, in the role of Rebecca. In less talented hands, Rebecca might sometimes become a nauseating, embarrassing bore. But Miss Fitzgerald turns loose all of her Irish art, her Gaelic charm, her brilliant theatrical skill, on this difficult role, and proves genuinely enchanting in it.

Millard Mitchell Gets A Serious Role at Last

Millard Mitchell, who always in the past seems to have been playing comic gangsters or innocent dumbbells losing money on the ponies, is permitted in "Sons and Soldiers" to tackle the role of the family doctor. In Rebecca's dreams the doctor becomes an embittered, sardonic souse, and Mr. Mitchell plays a scene as this tortured medico that is among the most impressive we have seen in years of theatre going.

Karl Malden, Leonard Sues (with his eloquent trumpet), Kenneth Tobey, Stella Adler, Hubert Dudley and a number of others, some of them "bit" players, bring their roles sharply to life at the Morosco, and if we were never quite able to believe in Gregory Peck as an eager, wide-eyed, ecstatic youth, Mr. Peck nevertheless is fundamentally an excellent actor who is by way of being permanently saddled with mussy-haired, shirt-open-at-the-collar roles.

It was hard for us to believe that Mr. Peck wasn't old enough to know better when he made a fool of himself over the doctor's highly promiscuous wife, but then Mr. Peck had the cards stacked against him from the very beginning.

For some reason or other the author brings him in, full-grown and twenty-five, before Rebecca even dreams of him as a baby. This, we submit, is a mistake. It causes weary gentlemen in the audience to shudder and ejaculate, "Oh God! A fantasy!" It's enough of a strain having Rebecca do all this pre-natal dreaming without having Andrew leap, full grown, out of her subconscious.

If we had the space, we would go on to call attention to other awkward moments, such as the unnecessary doubling of a couple of extras for the dancing principals when Rebecca and her son had quick changes to make. Crude, that touch, giving the play the aspect of a stunt, with perhaps a bit too much offstage piano playing and an overdose of hysterical female laughter.

But on the whole "Sons and Soldiers" is an entertaining, sometimes stirring, show. See it.

"Three's a Family"

N. Y. NEWSPAPER PM
May 6, 1943

You Can't Be Too Choosey In May

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ALL things are relative; and coming in the month of May, when every farce must be presumed guilty until proved innocent, *Three's A Family* doesn't make too bad a defendant. It could be a great deal better and still not call for dancing in the streets. It could branch out a little in terms of what it jokes about, and still not bewilder you with its profusion. It could dispense with scenes and drop out characters and lop off jokes, and in terms of my own personal taste, it could even be concerned with an entirely different theme. A whole evening of diapers, deliveries of children, and domestic confusion is not for me the high water mark in fun. But as completely popular fare *Three's A Family* does have its very funny moments and its not half-bad stretches, and it does always somehow manage to keep going, if only over the same ground twice. For what it is, it passes muster.

The story begins with a household of three in a small apartment — the middle-aged Whitakers and Mrs. Whitaker's old maid sister, Irma. Very soon it becomes a household of five, when the Whitakers' daughter, Kitty, moves in with her baby, her husband having gone off to war. A great deal of baby furniture moves in with them, and Irma is relegated to the living room couch, which opens at night into a highly unmanageable bed. Eventually it becomes a household of seven, when the Whitakers' son, Archie, and his wife decide to have their baby there because the hospitals are full up. And at curtain time, you will have guessed, it has become a household of eight.

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A household of eight, not counting maids who come and go and whose little idiosyncrasies are clearly necessary to a farce of this particular build. The maids, on the whole, are on the plus side of the proceedings, and so is the half-acid, half-addled Irma; while way on the plus side is a doddering, partly deaf and four-fifths blind baby doctor—the only one to be had with all the younger doctors off to war. Dr. Bartell's first groping visit to the household is a hilarious ten minutes, and your best reason for seeing the show. His reappearances are not quite so good, but they are always refreshing.

The Whitaker tribe proper—particularly the younger members — are much less happily conceived, and frequently bores. A number of the play's jokes fail to cross the finish line, and a number of others never even get off to a start. And the show would be greatly helped if it were freely cut, particularly in the matter of the marital rows between Kitty and her husband.

As Dr. Bartell, William Wadsworth easily walks off with the acting honors, though Ethel Owen gives a very good account of herself as the old maid. Doro Merande and Gee Gee James prove helpful whenever they come out of the kitchen; while Ruth Weston, Katharine Bard, Edwin Philips and others turn in competent performances. Mr. Ephron's direction is competent too, though hardly inspired.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 6, 1943

Increase in the Birth Rate

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

THERE is an abundance of infants in the new farce comedy presented last night by John Golden at the Longacre. The play's comedy value is based on the supposition that if you introduce enough born and unborn babies into the small New York apartment of an average family you can create enough disturbance to capture two and one-half hours of dramatic attention. What has resulted is a sort of variety show with a baby act filling every other spot on the program. There are gags galore and a lot of genuine laughs, but there is not enough breadth or complexity in this script's situations to hold its high spots together.

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The stage household of "Three's a Family" is upset in the opening moments of the play by the arrival of an unhappy daughter and her newborn child. The play goes along for awhile on this original confusion, and when things begin to lag another birth is wrought, and then another. Henry and Phoebe Ephron, the co-authors, have piled Ossa on Pellon in this respect, but they have never bothered to weave into the script the variety of incident and situation that is usually necessary to a successful farce.

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This play has its moments, and it is easy to see why it was considered promising. There are a number of excellent comedy lines. Mr. Ephron, who directed the proceedings, has added a few extra laughs to his own script by several good sequences of pantomime. Many of his characters are convincing farceurs. But they are rarely given anything to do, and most of their time is spent snapping at each other in a belligerently theatrical fashion. As a result, the texture of the humor becomes too obvious, and the play suffers from the contrast between its ups and downs.

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One character in this play, a near-blind and halting doctor, played by William Wadsworth, contributed more laughs to "Three's a Family" than all the rest of the evening's doings. This was a very well acted and well directed farce role. Ethel Owen as the sour maiden aunt, Robert Burton as the head of the family, Gee Gee James as a recalcitrant maid, and Edwin Philips as a worried father also help things along with knowing comedy performances. Most of the people connected with this production have given of their best, giving it an occasional and much-needed lift. They have only succeeded in adding spasmodic moments of interest to a generally static and lifeless play.

N. Y. WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 6, 1943

Three's a Family Opens at Longacre

By BURTON RASCOE

WILLIAM Wadsworth celebrated his 50th year on the stage by stopping the show last night as the senile but utterly reliable baby-deliverer and baby doctor in Three's a Family, a discreetly ribald and rib-tickling domestic farce by Phoebe and Henry Ephron, produced by John Golden, in association with John Pollock and Max Siegel, at the Longacre.

In fact, Mr. Wadsworth stopped the show twice and would have stopped it a third time if his remark, which produced a prolonged outburst of laughter, hadn't been an exit line, allowing the audience sufficient time to regain its composure before the next lines needed to be uttered. There was a comic build-up before Mr. Wadsworth appeared; he was the only doctor in the neighborhood of W. 110th St. so old he could not get into the Army Medical Corps; he was nearsighted, absentminded and referred to as a zombie. When he showed up, he lived up to his advance notices in appearance and actions; but Mr. Wadsworth's characterization was naturalistically appealing and not a caricature.

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Dead-Pan Laughs

The first time he stopped the show was when he automatically wrote out a prescription when he had been called in by an oversolicitous young mother who was too alertly looking for symptoms of some dreadful disease in her fretful offspring. He had made the necessary motions of writing out the prescription before he discovered he hadn't taken the cap off his fountain pen. Then, just as though it happened all the time, he took the cap off, wrote the prescription out again and handed it to the young mother. She asked if it was for the baby and he said, "No; it's for you. These pills will put you to sleep and then the baby can get some rest."

From the fact that this line brought down the house you can get a hint of the sort of entertainment that is in store for you at Three's a Family. The whole thing is as silly and improbable as Charley's Aunt and yet built as surely along the sure-fire formula of laugh appeal. In essentials it is no more than an elaboration of the current jokes about the prevalence of pregnancy, the overflowing of the maternity hospitals, the domestic dislocations brought about by the number of women who have entered war work, the scarcity of servants, the amorous complications arising from short, unexpected leaves of absence and the just as unsuspected sudden recall, and the perennial about the expectant father, who is in a continual state of nervous idiocy; but it is funny.

Edwin Philips, whose role is to epitomize and animate the last-named joke, scored second honors as a laugh provoker last night; his line which made us howl came after he had inquired if there were going to be any strawberries. When told there were not he said wistfully, "I've got such a yen for strawberries." Up to that time he had already shown nearly every symptom of pregnancy, from nausea to hysteria; his disclosure of his special craze for strawberries capped the climax. Besides, Mr. Philips was appealing as a distracted and worry-ridden father-to-be.

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Top-Drawer Play

The play itself is right out of the top drawer of the old reliable protector and champion of the sturdy, commonplace American home, John Golden. Its reception last night is a rebuke and a warning to Harry Hopkins and others whose plans for the nation's future are alleged to be the liquidation of the middle class. For the message of the play is that over three million middle-class babies were born last year; they each had two parents, besides a large assortment of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents—all of whom roll up into quite a sizable hunk of humanity for Mr. Hopkins et al to lop off. And the members of last night's audience, who recognized themselves and their experiences intermittently and (fundamentally) continually in the sentimental and homey scrapes and situations, took the play to their bosoms with merry affection. It is one of those farces so close to average experience that it is likely to go on and on and on.

The story is about the situation produced in the Whitaker apartment on the upper West Side in New York when their daughter runs home to mother, for the 'teenth time, this time with a baby after another spat with her husband. The flat is already crowded because Sam's old maid sister gave him $1200 to invest in 1929; he lost it in the stock market crash and she has been living on him ever since. Sam's wife is the business woman type, while Sam himself is the maternal type of man, who is no good at earning a living but is a wonderful helpmeet around the house. He has brought up his son and daughter since babyhood, while Mamma Whitaker has brought in the dough. Sam's hobby is cultivating guppies.

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Performers Excel

Sam's son, who is on the serious, but daffy, side, is also married and presently he also brings home a wife who is 12 days past her delivery date. He can't engage a room in any hospital in town and resignedly accepts the hospital's information that it is patriotic to have babies brought into the world at home. It would be Sam's home, of course. There is also a crisis produced by the fact that Sam's son-in-law, who has enlisted in his pique against the wife with whom he has quarreled, comes home on leave from camp with an armload of presents for his baby only to find everybody has cruelly gone away from the house leaving the baby unattended and the baby and colored maid have disappeared. It is a hell of a mixup all around, with comic business displayed by Ethel Owen as the spinster, trying to get to sleep in a davenport in the living room; by the lawyer, who has been summoned by the indignant young father who wants a divorce from an "unnatural" mother, and who brings along his pregnant bride; and by various other members of the cast.

The cast plays with comic high seriousness; special honors besides those mentioned going to Robert Burton as Sam Whitaker, to Katharine Bard as Mrs. Whitaker and to the always delightful Doro Merande (who has only a brief but amusing moment in the first act). Corny, but fun.

"Three's a Family"

NEW YORK SUN
May 6, 1943

'Three's a Family,' Obstetrical Farce, Presented at Longacre Theatre

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE drama's final fling for the month of May, if not the season, came along last evening in the form of a little farce comedy, "Three's a Family," which opened at the harassed Longacre under the auspices of John Golden. Written by Phoebe and Henry Ephron, it is forlorn, frenzied and obstetrical. But it has several characters that gave the first audience some amusing moments.

One of these is Miss Irma Dalrymple, spinster sister of the Whitakers; another is the colored maid, who drinks a quart of Scotch and phones Savannah, and a third is the doddering Dr. Bartell, who seems to have wheeled over from the home for aged obstetricians and who surely must have delivered little Virginia Dare when her lusty wails awoke the Virginia colonists some 350 years ago.

As for Miss Dalrymple, she was about the only one of the "Three's a Family" ladies who hadn't had, or wasn't having, a child. At least it didn't appear so from Row E. But if the Ephrons had gone on to write a fourth act there would probably have been another call for Dr. Bartell. The good doc, played by William Wadsworth, an able character actor of long experience, quite stole the show. He had several female members of last night's audience in convulsions, if not in need of his very special attention.

"Three's a Family," the locale of which is West 110th street, New York, has had a change of title since its Washington tryout and it now comes into the Longacre with John Pollock and Max Siegel, in type just like this, sharing the presentation honors with John Golden.

The majority of the performances are of the routine variety, but certainly not when the old doctor is wandering about. Ethel Owen is feisty, sharp and funny as the sister who has to sleep on the day-bed in the living room. Katharine Bard is an attractive ingenue (and mother) in a skimpy role and Gee Gee James is very funny as the Harlem maid who likes chocolates, alcohol and long distance. Robert Burton, drafted from the Golden executive staff, plays Sam Whitaker; Ruth Weston is his wife. If any playwrights are listening, Miss Weston is a girl who would like a good part.

"Three's a Family" turns the stage of the Longacre into a maternity ward and it brings a new playwrighting team into the ranks of Broadway playwrights—the Ephrons, Phoebe and Henry, who was stage-managing "Junior Miss" before he turned to more precarious pursuits.

Whatever the outcome of "Three's a Family," the Ephrons might be reminded that man-and-wife collaboration has resulted in Broadway hits from time to time. The Spewacks, Sam and Bella, did the trick. And so did the Hattons, Frederick and Fanny, with plays called "Lombardi Ltd." and "Years of Discretion."

I don't believe either was about obstetrics.

'THREE'S A FAMILY'

Play by Phoebe and Henry Ephron; staging by Mr. Ephron; setting designed by Stewart Chaney; presented by John Golden at the Longacre Theater Wednesday, May 5, 1943. The cast:

Sam Whitaker	Robert Burton
Irma Dalrymple	Ethel Owen
Adelaide	Doro Merande
Kitty Mitchell	Katharine Bard
Archie Whitaker	Edwin Phillips
Hazel, his wife	Dorothy Gilchrist
Frances Whitaker	Ruth Weston
Delivery Man	Edmund Dorsay
Eugene Mitchell	Francis de Sales
Two Moving Men	Carl Judd
	Earl McDonald
Another Maid	Gee Gee James
A Girl	Jean Bellows
Dr. Bartell	William Wadsworth
Joe Franklin	Richard Midgley
Marion Franklin	Virginia Vass

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 6, 1943

Golden Presents New Farce Comedy About Babies—Just Babies

By JOHN ANDERSON

THEY had a good deal of trouble finding a name for the new farce comedy which opened at the Longacre last night, and after trying among others, such unlikely titles as "The Wife Takes a Child," and "Three Cornered Pants" settled at last on "Three's a Family." They seem to have had a good deal of trouble finding dialogue for the play too, but after a first act that was hardly able to be up and about, the play gathered speed and some laughs, and it reached eleven o'clock with a modest score of mild entertainment. Thanks to the character of a tottering and batty old doctor played hilariously by William Wadsworth there are two passages in it that are genuinely funny. So give the play a barely passable grade C, and Mr. Wadsworth my undying gratitude. The authors owe him much more than that.

These authors are Phoebe and Henry Ephron (Mr. and Mrs.) and their play is about babies—just babies. I suspect that if Mr. Ephron had persuaded his one-time mentor George S. Kaufman to cut out the dead spots and put zippers on the performance, instead of trying to direct it himself, the fun would have been faster and doubtless more furious.

Caustic Comment

As it was the play loitered so heavily through the first act that Mr. Golden, the producer, was suspected of arranging the test alert during the intermission to be sure no one would leave.

The trouble with the play is that the authors are unable to create much interest in the characters or the general situation. They hit the laughs only in passing incidents and random lines, and by the steady barrage of caustic comment from a typical Kaufman character—the verbal sharpshooter detached from the plot but sniping the others.

This dead-pan Miss Dalrymple, amusingly played by Ethel Owen, is a spinster who objects to being turned out of her home by the rising birthrate. Mr. Golden's office has thoughtfully supplied me with the delightful information that there were a quarter of a million more births in the U. S. in 1942 than during the year before, and I am relieved to know that the farce has at least a sound statistical leg to stand on.

Miss Dalrymple lives with her sister and brother-in-law in an apartment in W. 100th st. and she complains bitterly when her unhappily married niece comes back to the parental roof with her baby, forces her to take to the living room couch. Then the son of the family arrives, with his expectant wife, and before Miss Dalrymple knows it there are two squalling infants in the flat, and she is being bundled off to war work.

Bumbling Doctor

That is about all there is to it, except for minor and casual complications. The angry young son-in-law rushes off to the Army and Papa abondons his housework and takes his job. Mother is busy all day at the office and can't tell one cook from another so Aunt Irma's icebox cake is left in the oven, and they have to send for Dr. Bartell to attend to Junior's wife, who somehow gets the idea that the drunken maid put the baby in the oven instead.

If it doesn't make much sense it does occasionally make a little nonsense and when the doctor arrives he gives an anemic play a quick transfusion, and the consoling relief of easy laughter. As Dr. Bartell bumbles around, taking the wrong women for his patients, and treating all of them as if they were their own grandmothers, it is very funny indeed and the audience almost cheered with gratitude everytime Mr. Wadsworth stuck his baffled face through the door, looking for the stork or any reasonable facsimile thereof.

The others play it briskly for what the flimsy characters are worth—notably Ruth Weston, Katharine Bard, Edwin Philips, and Robert Burton.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 6, 1943

'Three's a Family' Is a Farce Sprinkled With Baby Laughter

"Three's a Family," comedy by Phoebe and Henry Ephron. Produced by John Golden at the Longacre Theatre, New York, May. 5, 1943.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IF John Golden doesn't raise William Wadsworth's salary today he is no friend of mine, or of justice, or of the Society for the Encouragement of Laughter in the Theatre. Especially in wartime.

Mr. Wadsworth is a veteran actor who waddled into the middle of an amusing but fairly artificial little comedy called "Three's a Family" at the Longacre Theatre last night and, so far as this audience is concerned, saved the play.

He played Dr. Bartell, an aging obstetrician who has been forced back into practice to release younger physicians for war service. He is deaf and a little blind, and by the time he has delivered thirty-six babies in a month he is practically dead on his feet.

But, fine old Hippocratian that he is, old Doc Bartell carries on. In the play he is as real as real, and his performance is in joyful contrast to those that have been staged only for the lightly forced lines and laughs that Henry Ephron, who wrote the play with his wife, Phoebe, and Mr. Golden have read into them.

What's in a Name?

"Three's a Family," which started out as "The Wife Takes a Child," afterward became "Three Cornered Pants" and "The Home Front," is devoted mostly to baby jokes. Which, naturally, include diaper jokes and pregnancy jokes and hysterical father jokes.

Now, a discreet assortment of these furnish fun for a little while but not for long. Not to me. The Ephrons, egged on by their producer, I have no doubt, have depended on them to inspire practically all the laughs that fall in the first act and a half, and that isn't good for the comedy.

But then the pregnant ladies begin to double, in number as well as size; the complications attendant upon turning a two-room apartment into a sort of lying-in hospital become increasingly ridiculous and old Doc Bartell takes over.

Then for a time "Three's a Family" becomes foolishly gay and rewarding fun. There were shouts as well as gurgles from last night's first audience, and these auger well for a Summer run. We can always do with a good farce in Summer.

Lively Cast

Mr. Wadsworth's support includes Robert Burton, who plays the father of the first young mother who brings her baby home to live after she quarrels with her husband. His is a modest and a good performance.

Ruth Weston is a worried but proudly self-supporting mother, and Ethel Owen a snappy sister-in-law. Katherine Bard, a daughter of the Navy, plays the harassed daughter and Francis De Sales is the husband, both doing right by their opportunities. Edwin Phillips develops a comic misery and some nausea as an expectant father and comedy servants are lightly over-characterized by Doro Merande and Gee Gee James.

Stewart Chaney has contributed a pleasant interior and Mr. Ephron, who has been acting in "Junior Miss," did the directing.

"Three's a Family"

NEW YORK TIMES
May 6, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Three's a Family"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

UNLESS something as yet unannounced comes along before June 1, the play-opening season ended last evening with the arrival of "Three's a Family," at the Longacre. It did not end on too happy a note, for the comedy turned out by Phoebe and Henry Ephron is some distance from being hilarious; it would be weak even though the Winter rules for Broadway were not still in force. For two acts the Ephrons are writing impersonal gags which more often than not are flat, and by the time the comedy warms up a bit for the end the evening is pretty far gone—too far gone, it is suspected, for rescue.

* * *

"Three's a Family" is a comedy about the raising of babies and care of expectant mothers, and the joke about diapers grows rather thin in repetition. The characters of the play sit around their living room, conversing in carefully chiseled epigrams, their speeches so alike that it is impossible to tell the speakers apart—a state which makes two acts and more sound like a recording of dialogue rather than a play. Occasionally a bit of sentiment is tossed in for no particular purpose; or, at least, it serves none in rescuing the characters from their puppet estate.

The Ephrons's theme is of an apartment household to which returns the daughter and a 4-month-old baby, the father having gone into the Army. Presently, when the family has discussed bathinettes and rashes and formulas to some distance beyond the time limits of same, even for comedy, the son of the family comes home with his wife, who wife, who naturally is expecting a baby too. Then, all "Three's a Family" needs is for the father to return on furlough to find his child has been taken out by a drunken maid and the lawyer he calls to divorce him from his wife is an expectant father. There truly are a lot of potential children around the Longacre.

* * *

Lest this sound like a complete indictment, let it be noted here that the play does boast of one of the funniest characters of current Broadway. It is that of an old, partly blind and wholly confused doctor who, due to the shortage, has been called back into service. As William Wadsworth plays him, he is immense; single-handed he raises whatever parts of "Three's a Family" get far off the ground. Of the others, Robert Burton and Ruth Weston are the grandparents and Katharine Bard and Francis de Sales the parents of the noise in the other room. There are good bit parts by Doro Merande and Gee Gee James as the family maids.

NEW YORK POST
May 6, 1943

"Three's a Family"
A Farce About Babies at the Longacre

By WILELLA WALDORF

JOHN Golden's statistical department informs us that there were a quarter of a million more births in the United States during the year 1942 than there were in 1941, and that out of a total of 180,000 physicians in the country, more than 50,000 are in the armed services or otherwise unavailable to civilian patients. There are likewise 30,000 fewer nurses.

Anybody who didn't know John Golden's record as a theatrical producer might deduce from this impressive array of figures that Mr. Golden had become interested in the social and economic problems involved, and was contemplating the production of a documentary drama of the Living Newspaper school.

But "Three's a Family," by Phoebe and Henry Ephron, which arrived at the Longacre Theatre last night, is a farce whose loudest laughs are derived from the spectacle of an aged, almost totally blind doctor, pottering around delivering babies with the resigned and weary precision of a factory hand turning out sausages.

Nothing Much Until Act III

"Three's a Family," formerly known as "The Home Front" and also as "Three-Cornered Pants," is a third act preceded by a vacuum.

Sitting before a typewriter half an hour after the final curtain at the Longacre, we have been trying to recall what happened in the first two acts, and all we can remember is a medley of sounds made up of equal parts of offstage baby crying and air raid siren.

The program carries a note heading: "Baby Sound Effects by Honey Mackenzie," and when the blackout signal began to scream last night we thought at first Honey was just putting on a little extra steam.

When the curtain went up on the third act, daughter's baby was still howling intermittently, while daughter-in-law was having her infant in the bedroom offstage, nearsightedly attended by the doddering physician, exhumed for the national emergency.

Father opined that there need be no fear. The old fellow could probably deliver babies in his sleep.

"Just the same," remarked Aunt Irma, "I think it would be a good idea to wake him up."

Hysterical Laughter

A gentleman in the row behind us roared so loudly at this sally that we looked around to see if by chance he happened to be a long-suffering baby, or at least a distraught parent, when it suddenly occurred to us that he was probably a doctor. He sounded definitely hysterical.

"Three's a Family" is concerned almost exclusively with babies and having babies, and the doubtful joy of the family when daughters, daughters-in-law, and even mere enciente acquaintances, keep dropping in and having offspring all over the distinctly limited 110th St. flat.

We found the first two acts extremely mild, in fact aggressively forgettable, but the third act does have its laughs. Just how many it has depends, we should say, entirely upon how much you've had to do with babies lately.

As for the cast, Honey Mackenzie, who may only be a recording, deserves a special note of commendation for offstage crying.

Diverting with very little material to work with was an actress named Ethel Owen as Aunt Irma, who was sour on the whole business from the very beginning. Robert Burton and Ruth Weston as the tortured grandparents—yes grandparents — were properly dismayed, and William Wadsworth gave a very good preformance as the aged doctor, overdoing it only slightly when many actors would have been all over the place in such a role.

"The First Million"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 29, 1943

Crime in the Ozarks

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY, Jr.

THE world of crime often serves as a good farcical subject when the theater's creative talent takes a certain slant on the ins and outs of a criminal's somewhat hectic existence. The secret of dramas which have been successful in this vein has been a constant burlesquing quality, which buries the audience's sanity under a constant flow of humor and overstatement. Unfortunately for last night's offering at the Ritz, the tone of Irving Elman's new satire is neither realistic nor caricatured. What results is a rather half-hearted presentation of comic opera criminals mixed up in a social problem that never succeeds in laughing itself off.

* * *

The opening curtain finds an Ozark mountaineer mother and her three sons trying to raise a million dollars by the simple process of holding up stores, banks and other centers of public wealth. This Machiavellian family is carrying on the tradition of their dead father, also a criminal, whose dying words were "The first million is the hardest." There is the stuff of which good farces are made in this basic idea, but its potentialities never develop, simply because the finished script contains only the barest number of effective comedy lines. John Kennedy's direction has helped a bit, but not enough to pack the play with the laughs it so definitely needs.

* * *

The caricature criminal can never to seem to be in earnest about his doings. If so, he loses the audience's sympathy and in so doing breaks the delicate soap-bubble of a farce's construction. There is nothing flippant or amusing in the oldest Ozark boy's "Tobacco Road" morals. There is nothing joyous in the idiot son's itching trigger-finger. Neither, since this play is an attempt at tongue-in-cheek comedy, can they be taken seriously. They fall, therefore, into a limbo of dramatic characterization, vacillating from one thing to the other and finally becoming meaningless.

* * *

It is not surprising that some of the performances in the play are not of the best quality, since the performers themselves may well have been confused as to whether they were playing comic melodrama or stark social drama. Harlan Briggs as the country banker is the only member of the cast who seems to realize that the play must stand or fall on its farcical merits. Dorrit Kelton, Wendell Corey and Lois Hall are all at ease in their parts, though their characterizations are too realistic for the play as a whole. It is too bad that nineteen-year-old Jimmy Elliott should make his debut as a Broadway producer with a play that never seems to know quite what it is supposed to be.

"The First Million"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 29, 1943

'The First Million,' Comedy of Ozark Natives on the Make

"The First Million," comedy by Irving Elman. Produced by James Elliott at the Ritz Theatre, New York, April 28, 1943.

★

By BURNS MANTLE

JIMMY" Elliott is boastfully young and youthfully ambitious. As a competent juvenile actor he has been playing the role of a singing messenger in the current "Junior Miss." His spare time for some months has been spent in assuring his friends that, with a little help, he could become a successful producer of plays.

Evidently some of the friends believed him, and advanced him sufficient capital to have a try at production. Last night his first venture was revealed at the Ritz Theatre.

It proved to be a silly comedy about a family of lightly demented and frankly lawless hillbillies living in the Ozarks. They are "Maw" Boone and her three sons and they are obsessed with the idea that they cannot begin spending their loot until they have accumulated their first million. They had promised "Paw" they would do that before the law got him.

The play, written by Irving Elman, and called "The First Million," starts when they have $980,000 hidden in the churn and are putting on pressure to get the other $20,000.

Poor Stuff

As entertainment it has nothing to commend it but a curiously well directed cast of better than average actors and a proper stage backing. That is more, it may be noted in passing, that many of the young man's more experienced elders have brought to the stage with similarly ill-starred enterprises.

The featured players are Dorrit Kelton, rawboned and keen-minded character actress, who plays "Maw," Russell Collins, an amiable sheriff, and Harlan Briggs, a kidnapped skinflint banker who out-crooks the crooks.

Lois Hall and Henry Barnard are pleasant young folk, and the Boone boys are gleefully realized by Wendell Corey, Dort Clark and George Cotton.

The first audience seemed mystified and a little depressed, which was reasonable. John Kennedy did the directing and the cabin set is by Wolfgang Roth.

'THE FIRST MILLION'

Play by Irving Elman; staging by John Kennedy; setting designs by Wolfgang Roth; presented by Jimmy Elliott at the Ritz Theater Wednesday, April 28, 1943. The cast:

"Maw" Boone	Dorrit Kelton
Hoke Boone	Wendell Corey
Mink Boone	Dort Clark
Sank Boone	George Cotton
Emmy Lou	Lois Hall
Sheriff	Russell Collins
Tom Boone	Henry Barnard
Mr. Fairweather	John Souther
Lucius J. Beasel	Harlan Briggs
Pidgie	Louise Larabee

WORLD TELEGRAM
April 29, 1943

The First Million Opens at Ritz Theater

By BURTON RASCOE

IT IS my unpleasant duty to report that I found The First Million, which opened at the Ritz last night, not only dull but stupid.

I don't know the age of the author, Irving Elman, but, from the circumstantial evidence, I should say he is very immature and has led an isolated life. For he doesn't know that even to under-10-year-old listeners to the bang-bang and giddap programs on the radio the idea hasn't been funny for several years that a banker is worse than a bank robber.

Much has been made of the fact that the producer, Jimmy Elliott, is only 19 years old. He is currently playing the role of the messenger boy in Junior Miss. He made his debut at the age of 12 in Sidney Kingsley's Dead End, and has since played in five other Broadway productions and in stock. The information in the program indicates that his life has been in and of the theater.

* * *

Old Stuff 80 Years Ago

He can therefore be excused on the ground that he hasn't had time to learn much about what's outside of the theater. But it is odd that someone connected with the show business didn't tell him that the substance of The First Million was pretty seedy as funny stuff when Artemus Ward got through with it as a "leckshure" over 80 years ago, and that they stopped using it in melodrama when electric lights came in.

The story of The First Million has to do with the matriarchal widow of an Ozark Mountain bandit who has brought up three of her sons to follow in their father's footsteps. When the play opens the trio has accumulated $980,000 by various bank robberies. Not a penny of it has been spent; the money, in currency, is hidden in a churn in their dilapidated cabin. When they have achieved their first million the old gal promises her stalwarts they can retire from robbery and spend the money on travel, liquor and women.

She plans all their robberies, and, on information that $20,000 has been deposited by the government at the county seat bank for the distribution of payments to farmers for slaughtering their pigs and refraining from growing crops she sends them out to bring home this cash. The idiot of the moronic trio inadvertantly shoots the night watchman without killing him, and the complications arising from this cause them to bring the banker home with them, along with the cash (only $10,000) in sight, thus adding kidnaping to their crimes.

The addition of the kidnaped banker to the Boone household gives the author an opportunity to develop his "satire" that the bandits are white-souled, innocent and honest in comparison with the banker, who is an avaricious liar and crook, who has not only robbed the local farmers of land and money but has been embezzling government funds.

* * *

It Gets More Complicated

One child of the matriarch is an honest young farmer, who is trying to help the government by developing synthetic rubber from soy beans, and who is in love with an orphan, found in the woods as a baby, who has grown up as the slavey in the house. There is some dreary melodrama about his keeping one of his libidinous brothers from raping the girl—melodrama so badly written and acted that it borders on bad burlesque, and this righteous young man burns up the whole million dollars in the kitchen furnace just as the sheriff marches in to handcuff the banker on a charge of embezzlement and call the three bandits out of the cellar to act as witnesses against the crook. After these five have gone out of the door the idiot comes back long enough to hand his mother a hundred dollar bill he had held out on a previous robbery, and she plops herself in a rocking chair, exclaiming with wicked glee that this hundred is the start on her second million.

If you can see anything whatever, satrical or otherwise, in the above outline of the play, wait a minute before you decide it is just the play for you; for I must also tell you that, with two exceptions, that of the two women in the play (Dorrit Kelton and Lois Hall), the play also is extremely badly acted. The director, John Kennedy, apparently couldn't make up his mind whether to stage the script as a farce or as a melodrama, and the result is pretty terrible. Miss Kelton almost managed to make her part creditable, and that is real triumph of acting over material. Miss Hall was unobtrusive and appealing in contrast to the mugging of Harlan Briggs and the general hamminess of the others. The only thing I can commend concerning The First Million is the setting of Wolfgang Roth; it is very good.

N. Y. NEWSPAPER PM
April 29, 1943

A Bad Play About a Bad Family

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT would be extremely pleasant to report today that 18-year-old Jimmy Elliott, in his first Broadway venture as a producer, has a roaring hit on his hands. I am forced to state, however, that Mr. Elliott has met the fate that has often befallen producers 40, 50 and even 60 years old. *The First Million* is a crazy-quilt of a play—about a highly unconventional family of bank robbers in the Ozarks—that might have been a funny burlesque of Western magazine stuff, or a raffish comedy about childlike criminals, or even a satire on conventional morality; but that is actually a pointless, muddled study in human wild life. It jumps the sense of probability, only to land in a ditch.

The play has to do with widowed "Maw" Boone and her stick-'em-up offspring (one of them a half-wit, another of them a tomcat) and the $1,000,000 goal they have set for their endeavors. At rise of curtain, they have $981,000 hidden in the churn; the price of a ticket entitles you to watch them go after the remaining $19,000. Arrayed against them are sheriffs, posses, G-men, a radio so busy describing their exploits that it has no time for soap operas or even Fred Allen; and, not least, the honest son of the family, who makes synthetic rubber out of soy beans and is all tied up with an orphan who gives the impression of being a deaf-mute.

* * *

Something pleasantly goofy, or freshly racy and ramshackle, might have emerged from all this had the characters been really picturesque, the story suspenseful, or the dialogue robust. But the characters are merely foolish, the story is rambling, and the dialogue both crude and flat. The whole thing jumps the track only to stop dead; it is lunatic without being lively. And very hard, at times, to explain. The sheriff, for example, cashes a $10,000 check at the bank in the middle of the night; and the brothers Boone are wanted as draft-dodgers in the early Summer of 1940.

The acting is all rather free-style, with Dorrit Kelton maintaining some kind of elementary order as "Maw." Harlan Briggs as a rapscallion banker, George Cotton as the catfish half-wit, Russell Collins as a comic-strip sheriff, and Lois Hall as Orphan Annie, do what they can. Doubtless Louise Larabee, who is down in the program as "Pidgie," would have done a very fine job, only they forgot to let her appear.